West Malling Blue Plaques

A free guide

First edition - 2025

This is an interactive history. The plaques you will find around West Malling commemorate but a few of our notable citizens, and their stories are not yet fully revealed. Further research and information is always welcomed.

Communities have a built and a social architecture - the histories of the people and the significance of their achievements locally and nationally. The historical social architecture is invisible, but both aspects are vital for success. This unique interactive history seeks to make visible the social architecture and enable further discovery by opening "portals" to the past. New information on the subjects of these plaques or suggestions for additional ones can be submitted to Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council. Click on the names in the Contents list to find more information on our notable citizens of the past. Or see our **map** to find out where each blue plaque is located.

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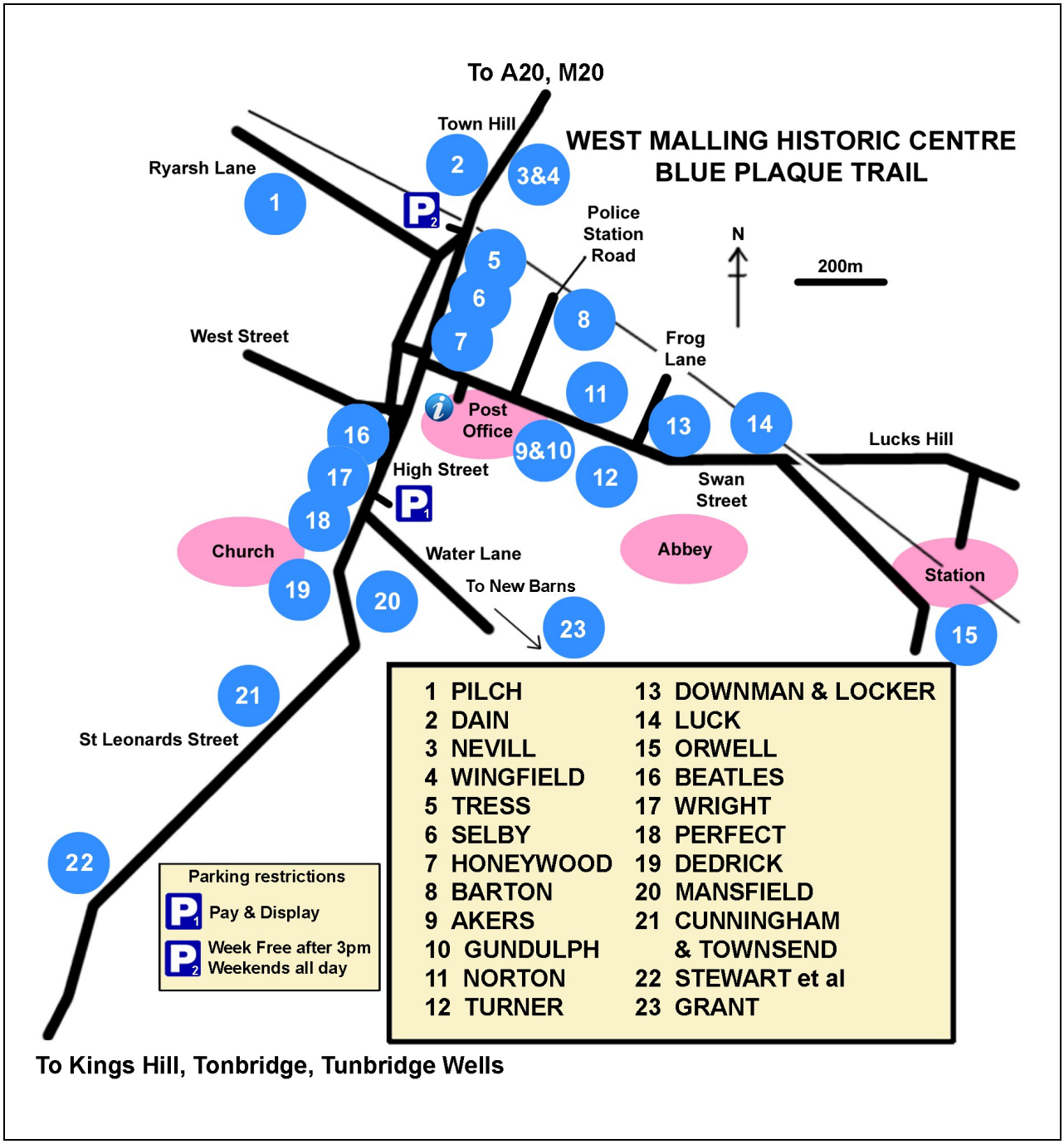
Location Map

There are 23 plaques, some commemorating more than one citizen. The plaques are numbered on the map in the order of a suggested walking tour.

Parking restrictions and conditions may vary. Always check the signage at the site.



ARETAS AKERS, born in October 1851, spent his early childhood at St Mary's Abbey, West Malling, his grandmother's home. His father was the local parson.
He was Home Secretary between 1905 and 1908, and was a Conservative MP for East Kent constituencies from 1880 until 1911. He was the Chief Whip in Conservative governments from 1885 to 1892, an era of party splits and high political tension over Irish Home Rule. In 1911 he was created 1st Viscount Chilston, taking the name from his country seat, Chilston Park, which he had inherited in 1875, along with the additional surname of Douglas.

Akers-Douglas was a significant figure in his party for over thirty years, an able administrator who is credited with improving party discipline from the 1880s onwards. He was a friend of Lord Randolph Churchill, and corresponded with Lord Salisbury and Queen Victoria, as well as writing the nightly parliamentary letter to Edward VII during Balfour's premiership.

After 1911 he retired almost entirely from public life, and he died in London in 1926.

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FREDA BARTON

Ellen Esther HILL was born in 1867 and married Fred BARTON in 1891. Living with his widowed mother in West Malling, Freda and her husband moved to Hadlow in 1893 and became interested in professional photography. In 1903 she became a firm friend of the notable London photographer, Henry Snowden WARD. An early member of the Royal Photographic Society, he was her mentor and instrumental in the improvement of her photography.

Between 1898-1905, Freda took many photographs of her family and friends, and in the Hadlow area. Being in demand and needing a larger property to work from, she moved, with her husband and three sons, to this house in 1905 which they rented. She set herself up as a commercial photographer under the name of Mrs Fred BARTON until her husband died in 1927, then as Freda BARTON Photographer until her death in 1940.

Her photographs include local gentry, their houses and a wide variety of subjects of exceptional quality in and around West Malling. The Freda Barton Collection is one of the very best portfolios of commercial photographs between the late 1890's and late 1930's providing a record of the social history of West Malling for future generations.

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THE BEATLES are generally recognised as comprising John Lennon (1940 – 1980), Paul McCartney (1942 -), George Harrison (1943 – 2001) and Ringo Starr (Richard Starkey, 1940 -). The rock band was formed in 1960, although the individuals started playing skiffle in the late fifties. The original line-up did not include Starr, who joined in 1962. The Beatles continued as one of the foremost rock bands in the world until their break up which started in 1970. During their existence they published 12 albums in the UK and the *Magical Mystery Tour* in America. In 1970 their song *Let it be* won an Oscar for the best original song score. Amongst their many other awards were 15 Ivor Novello awards.

As well as being an album, the *Magical Mystery Tour* was also released as a 52 minute film. It was first shown on BBC1 on 26 December 1967 and was largely filmed at West Malling airfield, at the time a de-commissioned RAF airfield and now Kings Hill. Shortly after the beginning of the film, Ringo Starr goes into a newsagent and buys tickets for the *Magical Mystery Tour* for himself and his “Aunt Jessie” from John Lennon. That newsagent was the Town Newsagency, then at 90 High Street, West Malling.

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JOHN CUNNINGHAM was born in the middle of World War I and joined the Royal Air Force in 1935. He flew many types of aircraft and became known as a test pilot. In 1940 when he was flying Bristol Blenheims, his squadron took up night flying activities, and developed the use of the new airborne radar. In September of that year he became a Squadron Leader, and two years later a Wing Commander. Whilst flying night fighters, his squadron shot down twice the number of enemy aircraft as any other. In order to keep the advent of radar secret, the story was told that this was due to a diet of carrots to improve his night vision. This led to him becoming known as “Cats Eyes” – and it also helped to promote the value of vegetables in the diet of a population of a country at war. In 1943 he continued night flying in command of 85 Squadron based at West Malling.

Douce’s Manor was used as accommodation, and also served as the headquarters for RAF West Malling and the officers’ mess. After the war Cunningham continued flying as a test pilot and flew the world’s first jet airliner, the Comet. He never married and retired in 1980.

Also stationed at RAF West Malling between April and December 1941 was Guy Gibson, then acting Squadron Leader of 29 squadron of Bristol Beaufighters. Later Wing Commander Gibson went on to lead the famous Dam Busters raid in 1943 for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross, Britain’s highest military award for bravery.

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The Rt. Hon. CHARLES KENNETH DAIN C.B.E. (centre of picture) and his wife bought 58 and 56 Town Hill in 1923, this being one property. It was their home until 1956. Before retirement he was Treasurer of Uganda at Entebbe, President of the Tender Board and Controller of Savings. He was awarded a C.B.E. in 1927. He was responsible for advising the British Government on all financial matters related to the British Protectorate of Uganda. After independence, Dictator Idi Amin expelled 60,000 Asians. Many thousands of people were killed in ethnic cleansing. West Malling housed many Ugandan Asians.

Town Hill Cottage 58 and Top Hill House 56, Town Hill are Grade 2 Listed Buildings. Town Hill Cottage (No 58) was originally a detached, 16th century half-hipped house, of earlier origin with considerable surrounding land and outbuildings. In the late 18th century Top Hill House (No 56) was built as an extension to No 58 by the Martin family. Circa 1900 the property was bought by the Nevill (Earl Abergavenny) family becoming part of their Lantern Estate opposite, with Lady Agnew in residence until c.1920.

Dain and his wife bought 58 and 56 Town Hill in 1923 this being one property. It was their home until 1956. The Hon. Dain, before retirement, was Treasurer, Controller of Savings and President of the Tender Board of Uganda at Entebbe. Responsibilities included the acquisition and disposal of Government assets. He was awarded a CBE in 1927.

JH Speke explored Uganda in 1862 it came under British Protection in 1894. Competing factions were eventually stabilised by skilful diplomacy, successful social improvements and a new Maxim Gun. The white population in 1909 was 507 with 3000 mainly British Asians. Native peoples comprised mainly three ethnic groups. The native states had home rule. Good roads, a railway, schools and medical facilities were built. An agricultural economy was successfully developed.

From 1904 cotton was grown by the native peoples and processed by Indians. In 1958 Internal self-government was established, and in 1962 Uganda was given independence with Milton Obote as Prime Minister. In 1971 Milton Obote, then president, was toppled by a military Coup led

by Dictator Idi Amin. In 1972 Amin ordered 60,000 Asians to leave. During the violent ethnic cleansing and Africanisation many thousands of people died. Many Ugandan Asians came to Britain. A large group were housed in **West Malling** on the site of the Old Workhouse.

Town Hill Cottage 58 and Top Hill House 56 Town Hill.
Grade 2 Listed Buildings. Town Hill Cottage (No 58) was originally a detached, 16th century, half-hipped house of earlier origin with considerable surrounding land and outbuildings. In 1789 Edward Martin and his French wife bought the house and land from Alexander Puxty who inherited from his Grandfather (also called Alexander Puxty). The Martin family had leased it for a considerable time. Prior to this records show ownership by Staples preceded by Bovey. A fashionable brick façade and rear extension had been built early in the 18th century.

In the late 18th century. Edward Martin built the three story house adjoining No 58 called Top Hill House as an extension to No 58. In !866 Earl Abergavenny bought the Mansion opposite called Lantern House (aka Malling House) from the heirs of Valentine Phillips (one of these being the owner of the famous Auction House of Phillips). In 1901 a member of Abergavenney's family bought No 58 and No 56 Town Hill which was then one house. This was occupied by Lady Agnew until 1920 about which time the Nevill (Abergavenny) estate was divided. Charles Kenneth Dain and his wife bought the house and lived here until 1956. The house was divided on their death and most of the surrounding land and part of the house gifted to their helpers.

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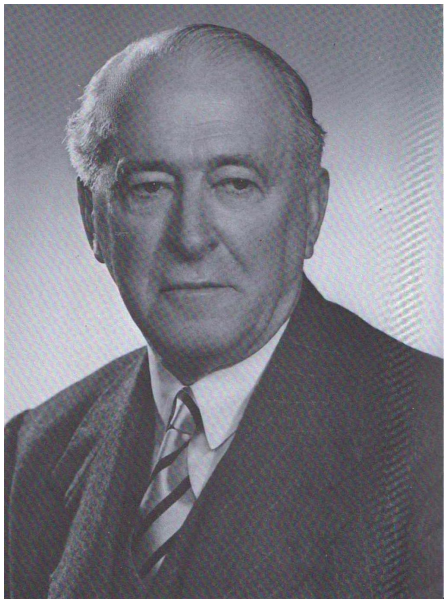

WILLIE DEDRICK was born in Snodland and died 18th March 1963 aged 77 years. His wife Doris Harriet died 2nd December 1981 aged 90 years. He was a scholar at Marlborough College and Managing Director of Snodland Paper Mill from 1919 to 1963. His father William was Managing Director before him and rebuilt the business following the disastrous fire of 1906 thus saving the livelihoods of many workers. Willie enabled the continued success of the business by links with *The Times* etc. A keen collector of art and antiques, he paid for the construction of windows in All Saints Snodland from medieval fragments left after a bomb blast. A beautiful window commemorating him by Moira Forsyth was installed in the ancient All Saints Church, Snodland in 1963, and a garden was built near the High Street. More information on the window can be found in Snodland Museum.

Willie Emerson Dedrick sat on the Bench at West Malling and was High Sheriff of Kent in 1952. The Office of High Sheriff is the oldest secular crown office. Originally the principal law officer, the role of Sheriff is now largely ceremonial.

At the end of WW2 Mrs Dedrick ceremonially planted a flowering crab apple tree at the North end of the small green on which stand the Town Sign and the Statue “Hope”. It is possible that the tree also commemorates his nephew Richard William Pearson killed in HMS Hasty off Malta June 1942 aged 22 years. The tree is still living at the date of writing.

Lord Abergavenny succeeded Willie as Chairman of Snodland Paper Mill 1963 and KJ Funnel, author of the book *Snodland Paper Mill*, became Managing Director.

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Willie Dedrick – more information

Andrew Ashbee, Curator of Snodland Museum says …

"William Dedrick (d.1920) and Willie Emerson Dedrick (d.1963) were, in their turn, Managing Directors of the Paper Mill. Both, too, served the church faithfully in many ways for many years. Some of the valuable glass destroyed in the war was salvaged and re-instated through the kindness of WE Dedrick at a cost of £200. This is now placed in the west windows of the aisles, both carrying the same inscription:
"Damaged by enemy action 1941 and restored 1949 in memory of William Dedrick (1857-1920) of the Paper Mill and of his grandson Richard Pearson killed in HMS Hasty off Malta, June 1942."
In 1966 Mrs Doris Dedrick gave a beautiful window in memory of her husband. Designed by Miss Moira Forsyth, ARCA, FMGP, it replaces the "Palmer window" which was destroyed. The inscription reads:
"To the GLORY of GOD and in loving memory of WILLIE EMERSON DEDRICK JP, Paper Maker, High Sheriff of Kent, 1952. 10th May 1885 - 18th March 1963.''

The following description was provided when the window was dedicated:
"The Church of All Saints is an ancient foundation and stands on the old Pilgrim's Way. The window has been designed to commemorate these pilgrimages to the shrine of St. Thomas a Becket at Canterbury. The left light shows St. Thomas vested as Archbishop, with the Arms of the See of Canterbury impaled with his personal arms, three Cornish choughs. At the head of the light is the Cathedral with pilgrims approaching. The right hand light shows above, an angel holding the emblems of martyrdom, the crown and the palm, and beneath, a procession of pilgrims: in the foreground, at their head, is shown the sister of St. Thomas, who was abbess of Barking. The Dedrick crest is shown in the top tracery.
"The glass of this window is of fine colour and quality, much of it a precious 'slab' glass no longer obtainable. The old stonework of the window is irregular in shape and has necessitated careful handling."

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JOHN DOWNMAN (1750 – 1824) was a minor but prolific painter, primarily of portraits, carried out in pastels or watercolours, or a combination of these. His portrait style, rapid, bright and light, is instantly recognisable and became very popular with the aristocracy.

Downman studied with Benjamin West after moving to London from Lancashire in 1767, and went to Italy with Wright of Derby and others in 1773/74, returning in 1775. He initially settled in Cambridge, where he was supported by the Mortlock family, local bankers, painting a series of portraits of the family. He was in London from 1778 to 1804 before moving to West Malling (which he refers to as "Town Malling"), where his brother, Lieut-Col Francis Downman was already living at Brome House.

At Went House he enjoyed time in the garden, producing sketches of toads and robins which he had apparently tamed, and painting local personalities, including members of the Douce family into which his niece, Jane, had married; and the Larking family of Clare House, East Malling. After two years in West Malling he moved to live in the West Country, then London, Chester and Wrexham where his only daughter married and where he died.

A list of his portraits reads like a Who's Who of the period including: Queen Charlotte; Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire; Sarah Siddons; Horatio Nelson; Frederick The Great of Prussia; Richard Brinsley Sheridan; 'Monk' Lewis and so on.

Further reading:
*John Downman ARA by Dr Williamson (1907)
*Dictionary of pastellists before 1800 by Neil Jeffares (updated 2010)

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Admiral JOHN FORBES (1714 – 1796) was mentor to John Locker, Horatio Nelson's "Sea Daddy." He refused to sign the Death Warrant of Vice-Admiral Byng.

Born in Minorca he was the son of the third Earl of Granard. He served on the *Burford* under his uncle Hon. Charles Stewart. In 1729 Stewart promoted Forbes to Lieutenant. He was Captain of the *Poole,* later commanding the *Port Mahon,* the *Severn,* the *Tiger* and the *Guernsey.* Commanding the *Norfolk* in 1742 he took part in the battle off Toulon in 1744, and gave evidence in the Parliamentary enquiry. As Rear Admiral of the Blue in 1747 he was second in command to John Byng. In 1748 he rose to Rear Admiral of the White. He became Vice-Admiral of the Blue 1755 and was elected to the Irish Parliament. Under William Pitt he became a member of the Admiralty Board. Forbes refused to sign the Death Warrant of Vice-Admiral Byng as he was convinced it was illegal. Many Europeans said that "From time to time the English hang an Admiral to encourage the rest".

In 1758 he married Lady Mary Capel and became Admiral of the Blue, Admiral of the White 1770, and Admiral of the Fleet 1781. He was highly respected.

Forbes passed his vast knowledge of naval matters to his friend and colleague William Locker, Horatio Nelson's acknowledged mentor and so called "Sea Daddy".

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Admiral Sir WILLIAM LOWTHER GRANT KCB (1864-1929) was born on 10th November 1864, the eldest boy in a family of six children. His father was a banker, and later a JP. They lived in the Portsmouth area, settling at Monckton House, Alverstoke in the 1870s.

Grant went to school at nearby Stubbington House, known as 'the cradle of the Navy', with close links to the training ship HMS Britannia, which he entered as a cadet in 1877. Although he had been placed twenty-third out of forty six successful candidates in the Naval Cadetship examination, he was described as 'very promising', and progressed from midshipman in 1879, to sub-lieutenant in 1883 after serving in the Anglo-Egyptian War (1882), and lieutenant in 1884.

In 1896 he qualified in torpedo duties and commanded a torpedo boat for manoeuvres in 1887. By 1893 Grant was recommended for promotion, as he was said to be 'very trustworthy, and handles [the] flotilla with skill'. In 1896 he was commended again for his 'zeal and ability' in preparing a report on trials of a Howell Torpedo at Newport, Rhode Island, and in 1897 was promoted to Commander. From 1898 he worked at the Admiralty's Naval Ordnance Department.

In January 1900 he landed in Cape Colony, was mentioned in despatches, and became a Captain in October 1900, in recognition of his service in the Second Boer War, where his detachment was nicknamed 'Grant's Guns'. He was in command of *Monarch*, *Sutlej*, *Hawke* and *Cornwallis* during the early 1900s, and was Naval Advisor to the Inspector-General of Fortifications. He acted as a Naval Aide-de-Camp to Edward VII in September 1908, and also became the Assistant to the Director of Naval Intelligence in the same year, before being promoted to the rank of Rear-Admiral in October 1909, shortly before his forty-fifth birthday.

From 1910 he was based at Sheerness (where he was stationed till November 1911), for special service with the Vice-Admiral Commanding the Third and Fourth Divisions of the Home Fleet. In King George V's

Coronation Honours in 1911, Grant was appointed Companion in the Military Division of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath, becoming a Knight Commander (K.C.B.) in 1917.

At the outbreak of the First World War, he initially commanded the Sixth Cruiser Squadron from HMS *Drake,* based at Scapa Flow*,* before he was promoted to Vice-Admiral in July 1915 and transferred abroad. He was then made Commander in Chief of the China Station in 1916, then Commander-in-Chief, North America and West Indies Station in 1918. By now Sir William Lowther Grant, he was promoted to the rank of Admiral on 1st September 1918. When he left the United States in 1919, the American Secretary of the Navy expressed his 'sincere regret' at the departure of 'this talented and gifted officer'. For his wartime service abroad he was awarded the USA's Distinguished Service Medal, the Légion d'Honneur, the Japanese Order of the Rising Sun, and also the Chinese Order of the Striped Tiger.

Grant retired in March 1920 'at his own request to facilitate the promotion of younger officers', but at the United States' request led a delegation in May 1922, at his own expense. In 1920 and 1924 he was reported in the press as defending Admiral Jellicoe's decision to prioritise avoidance of the loss of ships at the Battle of Jutland in 1916.

William Lowther Grant married Mabel Emily Brodrick, the daughter of a clergyman, who conducted the ceremony, in 1892, and they had three children, Alan Lowther Grant born in 1897, Marjorie Harriet Grant born in 1898, and Richard Brodrick Grant, born circa 1901. During their married life the family moved around because of his naval career, but in the early 1920's they settled in West Malling, at New Barns, where he died, after a short illness, on 30th January 1929, at the age of sixty four. His funeral was held in West Malling Church.

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GUNDULPH was born in Normandy, now part of France. In 1066 William of Normandy (later William I) defeated King Harold at the Battle of Hastings. Four years later, in 1070, Gundulph, while a monk in Caen, came to England to reorganise English monasticism. William I appointed Gundulph as Bishop of Rochester in 1078 and he set about rebuilding the almost derelict church. His ability in architecture soon became evident and in 1078 William used Gundulph's skills overseeing the building of the White Tower of London. Between 1077 and 1108 he was responsible for the building of St Leonards Tower in West Malling (named after St Leonard of Noblac, see "More information"), and around 1092 he founded St Mary's Abbey in West Malling for Benedictine nuns - one of the first monasteries for women - which is operational to this day.

He continued designing important buildings in south-east England, especially around his cathedral in Rochester, until his death on 7th March 1108.

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St Leonard of Noblac was a very popular saint in England and Europe in the11th century. He died c.559 AD and was the Patron Saint of Justice and all those suffering confinement such as prisoners, the mentally ill and pregnant women. French legends state St Leonard, who lived as a hermit in the forest of Limousin in France, was going to the Yule (Ewell) celebrations, and met a beggar who asked for wine. St Leonard had wine and gave him some, but then had no gift. The beggar told him to fill his flask from the spring and the water was turned to wine. St Leonard also saved the life of the French King's wife in childbirth and the King gave him woodland where he built an oratory and lived with two monks. Water in the French story was 1000 yards away at an Abbey dedicated to St Mary. The legend states St Leonard dug a great pit and filled it with his tears. He divided the King's woodland and supported the needy. St Leonard's Day was a compulsory public holiday in Worcestershire in the 13th century.

Now look at West Malling. The Ewell Spring here in West Malling rises below St Leonards Tower. The Abbey here is also dedicated to St Mary and is 1000 yards away from the tower. The lake is clearly excavated. Perhaps the whole complex in West Malling was modelled on the Norman French Legend? The story match is remarkable.

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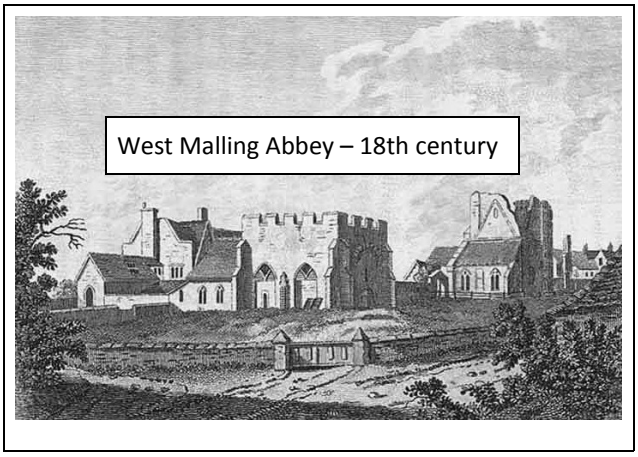
The Honeywood Family:
Five Kings, One Queen, One Bishop, One Archbishop, and Two Traitorous Knights

The group of buildings here on the corner of High Street and Swan Street is of national importance and has a remarkable documented history. Its relationship to the Norman abbey of West Malling has been revealed and there is much exciting research to be done.

In 1066 William of Normandy acquired the throne of England by conquest at the Battle of Hastings. Initially the land was assessed, redistributed and reorganised, followed by an intense period of castle and monastery building. Many churches were enlarged, and Saxon landlords were replaced by landowners with Norman French names.

In 1077 the famous military and ecclesiastical architect Gundulf was appointed Bishop of Rochester, and subsequently began building St Mary's Abbey in West Malling, believed by some authorities to be sited on all or part of the site of a Saxon Monastery (according to information held by the nuns of Malling Abbey). He is also credited with starting the building of St Leonard's Tower at the same time, and probably the unique Norman building to the rear of 67 High Street (*Source - Memories of Malling and Its Valley, C.H.Fielding*). For details see below.



Starting with the first Abbess, named Avicia, the Abbey prospered, despite fire and plague, becoming one of the richest in England. In 1278 the Abbess claimed liberties granted by Henry III, including a market on Wednesdays and Saturdays, together with *ingfangtheif* (the right to administer summary justice), granted by King John, and the right to hold fairs was granted by Henry III. The St Leonard's Day Fair was still being held on November 17th until at least the end of the nineteenth century.

A market cross stood at the junction of Swan Street (then called Holyrode, or Holyrood, Street) and the High Street. The head of an early medieval holyrood, or crucifix, is shown on one side of a squared block which supports a beam under the medieval building at 57 High Street, currently Frank's Restaurant. It is traditionally thought to be the head of the original market cross which was pulled down in the eighteenth century. There was a small prison or 'cage' in use on the little green on the High Street until the nineteenth century, so this area near the centre of West Malling was a focal point of the village until relatively modern times.

The Abbey is recorded as owning ancient vineyards on the North Downs at Halling, tanneries, a water mill, three West Malling inns and two blacksmiths' forges, among other interests (Source – Land Deeds held by Malling Abbey). The Roman Catholic Church owned the Abbey until Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries between 1536 and 1541, confiscating their wealth, treasure, and lands. The brave Abbess in 1539 resisted until the last, but the Abbey was passed to the Archbishop of Canterbury, then into the holding of Gervase Pierrepoint, and later, Hugh Cartwright. Cartwright's widow carried her interest to her second husband, Sir James Fitzjames, and later it seems to have come into the hands of Humphrey Delind – and thus to the Brookes of Cobham via Queen Elizabeth I in recognition of the Brookes' services to her.

In 1603, following the death of Elizabeth I, English courtiers plotted to depose King James I and replace him with Lady Arabella Stuart, with the financial support of the Catholic Spanish government, and both Lord Cobham and his brother, Sir George Brooke, were among the plotters. Lord Cobham planned to collect a large sum of money, travel to Jersey, then meet Sir Walter Raleigh and divide the money and use it to finance and spread sedition. Sir George was executed, and Cobham was imprisoned, along with Raleigh, in the Tower of London. Malling Abbey was confiscated from the Brookes, and the holdings transferred to Sir Robert Brett, his wife, and son Henry. Robert Brett survived his family and died in 1620. He is commemorated by an elaborate tomb

Tomb of Sir Robert Brett in St Marys church, West Malling

beside the altar in St Mary's church. Following his death without heirs, his lands and manors were granted to John Rayney by James I, and the estate was later inherited by his son, Sir John Rayney, Baronet of Nova Scotia, and confirmed by Charles II in 1662.

The plaque is attached to this fine medieval hall house at 1 Swan Street (obscured by 18th century modifications) the deeds to which were transferred as part of the Abbey to Sir John Rayney of Wrotham, Baronet, his wife Dame Ellen and his son on 6th February 1627 (see the schedule of notable former owners below). In 1671 Isaac Honeywood Esquire of Hampstead bought this building with Malling Abbey, whilst Frazer Honeywood later restored and altered the Abbey, and converted it into an elegant home. The property stayed in the Honeywoods' ownership until sold by Sir John Courtney Honeywood, Baronet, in 1809. In 1883 Mr E. Baldock bought the building which is still in the Baldock's family's ownership. They hold the original vellum deeds.

The corner building of this medieval group is a hall house, originally with a yard and well. It is attached and laid into the medieval buildings to the east. The building has been plastered over, and the jetty to Swan Street and the High Street was underbuilt with brick during the eighteenth or early nineteenth century. This alteration may have occurred when the building was sold to the clocksmith and his business partner, the tallow chandler, in 1809.

The remarkably high status of the early owners and the high quality of the door details visible on the upper floor suggest that this building is very important and of exceptional quality. The well was shared with the building to the north (57 High Street) which itself may have formed part of the original group sold at auction in the Swan Hotel in 1809. After world war 2, the owner of the then bakery at 51 High Street reported "Our handyman was sitting on the edge of the well and he fell in. We searched for him for two days but couldn't find him. We put a slab over the well."

The building to the north at 57 High Street, has a fine medieval moulded stone arch below the cellar trap doors, as well as a superb crown post roof. There was some early modernisation in the form of a 16th century inglenook fireplace replacing the original open hearth, and the medieval stone head of the market cross supporting an oak beam. The latter was probably a repair, but perhaps was a way of respecting and retaining this feature of the demolished Market Cross. A dwelling was constructed over the building's yard which is now 5 Swan Street.

The cellar at 57 High Street

Remnants of the Market Cross

The premises attached to the east of this building include a triple cruciform crown post roof and an oak tie beam approximately 25 feet long; such timber was reserved for royal or ecclesiastical use. A medieval inn sign, believed to be entirely authentic, depicting a swan painted on hand wrought oak was found nailed up as a repair to an inside wall of 57 High Street. This group of buildings probably formed the medieval ecclesiastical inn recorded as 'Le Swan' in the Abbey records. This would explain the extraordinarily high status of the owners.

Following is a list of this building's owners as recorded in the original vellum deeds held by the Baldock family.

	Sir John Walter, Knight
	Sir James Fullerton, Knight
	Sir Thomas Trevor, Knight
1627 (6th Feb)	Sir John Rayney of Wrotham, Baronet, his wife Dame Ellen and son
1671 (1st Feb)	Isaac Honeywood, Esquire of Hampstead
	Isaac Honeywood, Esquire (son of above)
	Frazer Honeywood, Esquire of Malling Abbey
	William Honeywood, Esquire and his wife Elizabeth

	Sir John Honeywood (eldest son of William) and his wife Dame Francis
	Sir John Courtney Honeywood, Baronet
1809	John Godden, clocksmith and William Williams, tallow chandler (at this time the building was a tailor's shop, house and yard)
1822 (1st Mar)	Misses Margaret and Susanna Alchin (probably of New Barns) (seem to have taken over Godden's mortgage)
1843	Henry Godden, clocksmith (son of John)
1849	Miss Mary Ann Alchin
1883	Mr E Baldock
	(Property has remained in Baldock family to date)
	The property has also been indentured to other notable people, including two grooms to the Bedchamber of His Majesty Charles II, six clerks to the court of Chancery, and Sir Thomas Twisden.

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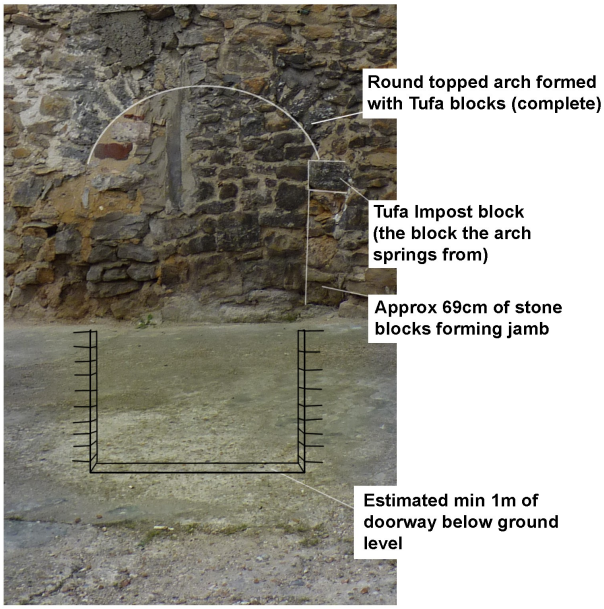
The Ancient House, West Malling

The Ancient House (also known locally as the Norman House) is at the rear of 67 High Street and is now attached to it, forming part of that property. Its east wall (pictured) can be seen from Swan Yard, just off Swan Street. It is a Grade 1 listed building and much more information on it can be found **here**

It is of Norman origin (c.1080) with many later modifications. It was built outside the Abbey walls, but at the same time, and was probably ecclesiastical in purpose. It is built of ragstone, with tufa blocks where needed structurally. The bottom right hand corner of the east wall is particularly interesting, and is shown enlarged below.

Evidence of a semi-circular tufa arch indicates the top of a doorway, and a tufa impost block supporting the arch can be clearly seen. Normally the impost block would be at roughly shoulder height, indicating that the doorway most likely extends downwards to ground level at the time of building – about a metre below ground level in 2021.



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WILLIAM LOCKER (1731-1800)

Locker lived in Went House between 1738 and 1786. By the end of the Napoleonic wars it was said that "[The British] are lords of the sea, and neither in this dominion nor in world trade have they any rivals left to fear", and for the first and last time in history a single navy possessed half the world's warships. Many factors contributed to this, including money, the provisioning of ships, seasoned timber and coppering. Alongside these, a hugely important factor was the professionalization of ship's crews - William Locker's career epitomised this professionalization. Coming from an academic and cultured family, he entered the Navy at the age of 15, serving on various ships during the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48), then with the East India Company after post-war decommissioning (sailing to India and China). He rejoined the Navy just before the Seven Years' War (1757-63), and he was on board HMS Sapphire at the Battle of Quiberon Bay (1759). By 1777 he rose to command HMS Lowestoffe, sailing her to the West Indies. For a fifteen month period during this command Horatio Nelson was one of his lieutenants, and this proved to be the start of a lifelong friendship.

Locker ended his career as Lieutenant-Governor of Greenwich Hospital and suggested the creation there of a national gallery of maritime art, subsequently realised by his son, Edward Hawke Locker.

Nelson corresponded with Locker until the latter's death, describing his naval actions, and famously wrote in 1799 (the Battle of the Nile took place in 1798): 'I have been your scholar; it is you who taught me to board a Frenchman…'. Importantly, Locker also passed on his hydrography skills. Also, at his expense, Locker arranged for Nelson to sit for a portrait by JF Rigaud.

In 1770 Locker married Lucy Parry(daughter of Admiral William Parry) at St Margaret, Addington and they lived at the Parry home of St Vincent's, Addington. They moved to the parsonage house at East malling in 1776. After Lucy's death giving birth to their seventh child in 1780,

Locker moved to West Malling and it is likely that Nelson visited him here. He moved to Kensington in 1787 and when he died in 1800 he was buried in the Parry family vault in Addington churchyard. Confirming the high regard in which Locker was held in naval circles and years after his death, William IV ('Sailor Bill') who had served under him, described him as 'the best man I ever knew'

Further reading:
*Nelson's Hero. The Story of his 'Sea-Daddy' Captain William Locker by Victor T Sharman
*The Command of the Ocean. A Naval History of Britain 1649-1815 by NAM Rodger
*Nelson - Love and Fame by Edgar Vincent
*The Pursuit of Victory: the life and achievement of Horatio Nelson by Roger Knight
*Nelson - The Dream of Glory by John Sugden

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THREE COLONELS LUCK

There were three successive generations of the Luck Family who served in the British Army and rose to the rank of Colonel. They have memorials in St Mary's church, West Malling, at the top of the High Street. The Luck estate (including The Hermitage - the family home) was large and included the land on which now stands both the school and the Roman Catholic church to the East. The Luck coat of arms is shown in a window of a building on the old Luck estate, and in stone above a door.

The three colonels are:
Colonel Everard Thomas Luck JP, 1844 – 1916.
Colonel Brian John Michael Luck, CMG, DSO, JP, 1874 – 1948.
Colonel Richard Frederick Luck, OBE, 1907 – 1963.

Within the Luck family as well was **General Sir George Luck**, GCB a very significant figure in the Army. He is mentioned below.

The family has pedigree from the time of Henry II and the Coat of Arms was proved by the Herald in 1634 at Rotherfield Sussex, where they appear to have been inter-alia ironmasters.

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The Luck family – more information

GENERAL SIR GEORGE LUCK was born in 1840 at Blackheath. During the second Anglo-Afghan War (1878 – 1880) he commanded the 15th Hussars. He was later posted to India where he became the Inspector-General of Cavalry. He then took on this post in the UK before returning to India in 1898, to become the C-in-C of the Bengal Command. He retired to Salisbury in 1903. Between 1905 and 1907 he was appointed Keeper of the Tower – a position in the British Royal Household and the most senior appointment at the Tower of London. He

died in 1916. He and his wife Ellen Georgina (Adams) are entombed in the family vault in St Mary's Church, West Malling at the top of the High Street.

Ellen's father was Major General Frederick Adam, GCB, GCMG, a hero of Waterloo whose troops made a brilliant and decisive manoeuvre at the peak of the battle. He was later ADC to the Prince Regent and Governor of Madras. Together with the Nevill family, the Lucks let property in the High Street and Swan Street, and financed four local schools. The Luck family home was in West Malling at The Hermitage, Lucks Lane, where three other members of the family are commemorated.

Brian John Michael Luck was born at Dane Court, Hartlip, the 11th child of 16 children born to Frederick Luck and his wife Harriet Elizabeth (Nee Goord). Frederrick, who for some unknown reason changed his name to Locke in 1877., was the grandson of Thomas Luck who came to West Malling living at Went House in 1824 where he died in 1857. Thomas was born at Ditton in 1765 where both his father George and grandfather William were owners of Ditton Court.

Thomas's son **Edward Thomas** was responsible for building the present Hermitage early in the 19th century on the site of a former moated house in an area where Saxon artefacts have been found. Edward Thomas Luck is recorded as paying rates on the building in 1827 and before that he was probably living with his father, Thomas, at Went House.

Edward Thomas Luck was born in Middlesex in 1798 and lived at the Hermitage until he died in 1877. The property then passed to his son Everard Thomas Luck upon whose death in 1916 the property passed jointly to his widow and Brian Michael William Luck the son of Colonel Brian John Michael Luck (first cousin once removed of Everard Thomas), but upon his sons death in India in 1924 he became joint trustee with Everard Thomas's widow Gertrude and upon her death in 1926 became the sole owner.

Brian John Michael Luck is recorded at the Royal Artillery Academy at Woolwich in 1891 and by 1911 was serving in the Royal Garrison Artillery at Gibraltar. When he resigned his commission in 1924 he was a Lieutenant Colonel. He married Marie Haig and as far as we can ascertain had two children, Brian Michael William and Frederick.

Colonel Brian Luck was a Justice of the Peace and a governor of both village schools. He had moved to a Flat at Cade House, shortly before his death in 1948.

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Captain CHARLES JOHN MOORE MANSFIELD

This is the last Will

and testament of me Charles John Moore Mansfield of West Malling in the County of Kent Esquire Captain of his majesty's ship Minotaur made published and declared the twenty seventh day of February in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seven.

Capt Mansfield. Reproduced by kind permission of Maidstone Museum

The extraordinary action packed life of this brave man, although only 53 years long, was nearing its end. It was a life which encompassed most of the events of British naval history during the latter half of the 18th and early 19th centuries. His Will, written with beautiful calligraphy using a feather quill pen, was prepared by the long established legal firm of James Selby in West Malling, Kent. It describes how he wished his worldly goods to be distributed.

Born in 1760 on the 15th November and christened on the 13th December, Charles John Moore Mansfield was the son of a dockyard officer at Stoke Damerel, Devonport. Childhood was a very brief affair in those days. At the age of eleven in 1772 he joined the Navy as Captain's Servant to Captain Fielding aboard HMS Kent.

The American Revolution

Following the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War in 1776, he transferred to HMS Foudroyant, and having been rapidly promoted to

Midshipman he transferred again to the frigate Diamond, and saw action in North America. At the age of eighteen, in 1778, when he was two years younger than the usual age, he was promoted to Lieutenant, joining HMS Albion. He transferred to HMS Sultan in 1779 and was in action at the Battle of Grenada, and later the Battle of Martinique. In 1780 he was made First Lieutenant of the frigate HMS Fortune, and in January 1782 he was in action against the French attack at the Battle of Frigate Bay in St Kitts. He then successfully sailed through enemy lines at night to gain information from the besieged British fort at Brimstone Hill, leading to the recapture of the fort and the island.

Return to England

In 1782 Mansfield returned to England. He served for a short time at the start of 1783 as First Lieutenant on the frigate HMS Monsieur before joining HMS Irresistible. Five years of peace followed and he returned to shore in 1788.

Marriage, Setting Up home in West Malling and Children.

Still only 28 and with all that action behind him, Charles married Anna Spong on 21st August 1788 at St Edmond's Church Lombard Street London. The Spong family owned extensive riverside properties on the Medway including those at Mill Hall, East Malling and Aylesford. The family's business interests included paper-making and milling. Charles and Anne set up home in West Malling. Their first child Seymour Herbert Mansfield born on 5th December 1789 in Rochester died aged twelve. Mary Mansfield was born in January 1792 and their third child James Hawkins Hughes Mansfield was born on 5th April 1794. After two years ashore war threatened again and he joined HMS Lion in 1790 as First Lieutenant, followed by service on HMS Assistance and HMS Stately.

Anna Spong. Reproduced by kind permission of Maidstone Museum

French Revolutionary Wars

On the 17th July 1793 he was promoted to Commander of HMS Megaera being elevated in 1794 to Post Captain of HMS Sphynx. He soon moved to HMS Andromache in which, after a very fierce and deadly encounter, he captured a substantial Algerian Corsair. In 1799 he moved to HMS Dryad and stayed with her until the peace of 1802. The

memoirs of one of the Midshipmen describe Mrs Mansfield and the two unruly children living aboard the Dryad in Portsmouth. She dressed in her own version of an officer's uniform complete with epaulets. Despite, or perhaps because of her eccentricity, she was well liked.

Napoleonic Wars

After the end of the brief peace following the Treaty of Amiens in 1802, Mansfield was given command of the battle-hardened ship HMS Minotaur of 74 guns. Soon he was party to the capture of the French frigate Franchise in the Channel and served as Admiral Collingwood's Flag Captain.

The Battle of Trafalgar

Also serving on Minotaur was Midshipman Charles Benjamin Douce (later Lieutenant) aged seventeen, being the fourth son of Thomas Augustus Douce of Douce's Manor, St Leonard's Street West Malling Kent.

The Battle of Trafalgar – William Clarkson Stansfield

On the 21st October 1805 during the famous Battle of Trafalgar, Minotaur proactively defended Nelson's ship HMS Victory from the counter attack by Rear Admiral Dumanoir's squadron. Suffering many casualties, Minotaur captured the ship Neptuno (see ship's log in the Nat Archives). (The treasure chest of Neptuno was auctioned in London in 2022, the date of the writing of this text). The actual Union Flag which was flown by Minotaur at Trafalgar is preserved in the Maritime Museum, Greenwich. Nelson was shot by a sniper and the Admiral's body was brought home preserved in a barrel of rum. Unfortunately the sailors had drilled a small hole in the barrel and drunk the rum.

Minotaur returned to England in 1806, with Mansfield suffering from rheumatism. For his actions at the Battle of Trafalgar, Mansfield was awarded the Naval Gold Medal. Mansfield visited Bath few a few days before returning home. The reason for his visit is unknown but Bath was known for its health-giving waters and sparkling social life!
In the spring of 1807 following the writing of his last Will and its Codicils, he was Flag Captain to Rear Admiral William Essington and third in

command at the Bombardment of Copenhagen. In Denmark this devastating offensive marks the first terror attack on a European capital, and led to the Anglo-Russian War of 1807. Mansfield received a share of the prize money for the captured ships but retired due to ill health at the end of the year. He did not live to see the end of the "Napoleonic Ware" (sic) as he died at Rochester on 23rd October 1813. His memorial is in St Margaret's Church, Rochester.
In fiction Manson appears as a character in the Hornblower series *Hornblower and the Hotspur*.

The end of Minotaur, the fate of Lieutenant Salsford and his pet wolf.

Minotaur met her end during a terrible storm which is commemorated by the famous painting by J W M Turner *The Wreck of the Minotaur*. There were many dead. Newspapers carried the eyewitness accounts of the sad deaths of Lieutenant Salsford and his pet wolf. The inseparable pair was drowned with paws and arms around each other's necks, the wolf howling miserably.

The Collingwood letters

There are letters held by Duke University, North Carolina which include some written by Admiral Lord Collingwood to Captain Mansfield. It is clear from these letters that they were friendly and acquainted.
Vice Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood, 1st Baron Collingwood was an admiral of the Royal Navy, notable as a partner with Lord Nelson in several of the British victories of the Napoleonic Wars, and frequently as Nelson's successor in commands. At the Battle of Trafalgar the fleet split in two to attack the French, with Nelson leading one half and Collingwood the other. Collingwood died in 1810 and is laid to rest in St Paul's Cathedral alongside Nelson.

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The Collingwood letters

Over 200 years ago Britain's world affairs were conducted and managed from vast distances, the only transport being sail and horse powered. Communication was by letters written with a bird's feather quill dipped in oak gall ink. Security was a matter of seals and stamps.

The first letter held was sent from Collingwood to Mansfield from "*Ocean off Cadiz, 20th March 1807*", and was in reply to a letter from Mansfield of 24th January 1807. Mansfield was at home in *"his own comfortable house in Malling"* with Mrs Mansfield and his children. Collingwood stated he was sorry to hear that His Majesty's Service had called Mansfield away from Bath so soon, where presumably he had gone for reasons of health. Mansfield suffered very badly from rheumatism. The Minotaur

was being repaired. He wishes Mansfield could join him before the French arrive and suggests that Mansfield could have another *"Neptuno very prettily painted"*. Neptuno was the name of the ship captured by Mansfield in Minotaur at the famous battle of Trafalgar. It seems that Mansfield had some input (via Mr Sykes as an intermediary) into the correct representation of the battle in a Panorama that was being painted and constructed in London by Mr Robert Baker. The panorama was (approx) a ten foot diameter circle of paintings where the viewer stood in the middle. Commenting on the book titled *[Memoirs of] The Rise and Progress of the [Royal] Navy* that Mansfield had loaned to him, Collingwood apologised for not returning it sooner via Mansfield's brother at Plymouth. He further commented that it was not entertaining and if the gentleman (presumably the author) lived a few more years he may add to it a volume on the declension (decline) of the Navy. Collingwood strongly believes that poops (a poop deck is a deck above a cabin, at the back of a ship, that enables observation to take place) are essential to the command of a vessel, a view he states he shares with Mansfield (*"we are of one mind in this matter"*). Clearly the two battle hardened, heroic characters are frustrated with recent ship design changes. Collingwood notes that John Serres, the painter, is doing pictures of the battle (Trafalgar) and asks Mansfield, if he goes to London, to talk to the artist (painter) about the subject of poops because every ship in the action had a poop although some had since been removed. He states he would not like to have any pictures of ships in his house without poops. He states he hopes to see Mansfield's honest face, but if not he asks if he can do anything for him, he will do it gladly. He ends the letter with the words "*I beg my best respects to Mrs Mansfield for though I have not had the pleasure of her acquaintance—as she is your better half I cannot but highly esteem her I ever am my dear sir your faithful Able Servant – Collingwood*".

The second letter Collingwood wrote to Mansfield was written on July 6th 1807 from a ship located in the "*Ocean off Sardinia*", and it thanked him for his letter of 1st May. Collingwood was probably engaged in the Adriatic war as part of the Napoleonic Wars. Hostilities were just about to intensify. He apologised for the delay in replying saying that he received Mansfield's letter a few days before he left Cadiz and had not had a moment since to reply. He says that as it told him Mansfield was well and that Mrs Mansfield was with him he knew that Mansfield, being tired of the cold North Sea, was happy. He hoped that Minotaur would be sent out to join him and would truly like Mansfield to be there with him. He had it strongly in his mind that action was about to happen and that there was nobody whom he would more respect than Mansfield or whose support on the day of trial he would want.
Collingwood said that he was sorry to hear that Minotaur had been "*unpooped*" and he complained that people knew so little about ships that they would remove the only good observation command station. Collingwood says he does not think he will much longer sail in ships but hopes he never has the misfortune to serve in one where he is hidden away behind barricades and cannot see anything. He says he would have no pictures in his house of ships without poops.
He talks a bit about some "news" of Naval movements and personnel, and lastly Collingwood writes he had intended to send back the book he borrowed from Mansfield to Mansfield's brother but always forgot. It was not very interesting, so he hopes Mansfield will forgive him and he gives his best regards to Mrs Mansfield.

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NEVILLS/ABERGAVENNY

The Rev WILLIAM NEVILL 4th Earl of Abergavenny (1792-1868) bought Lantern House and Estate (now called Malling House) in 1866 from the Heirs of Valentine Phillips, one of whom was Phillips of the famous Bond Street Auction House. William succeeded to the title of 18th Lord of Abergavenny in 1845. Chaplain to King William IV, he was Vicar of Frant and Rector of Birling. With General Luck of the Hermitage he let property in the High Street and Swan Street to finance four local schools.

He married **CAROLINE LEEKE** and they had seven children. Five were living in 1866, Henrietta-Augusta, Ralph Pelham, William (later the 5th Earl and 1st Marquis of Abergavenny) Isabel and Caroline. The daughter, The Lady Caroline Emily Nevill 1829-1887, was an exhibitor at The Royal Photographic Society and a founder member of The Photographic Exchange Club, producing a series of architectural views of Kent 1855-1858. She was a pioneer of early waxed paper negative and luminous lint photography. Together with her two sisters (called "The Trio") she produced embroidered artworks. She spent her time fundraising and helping the poor of West Malling, living most of her life here. She died in London, her body being transported from West Malling Station at walking pace to Birling by Mr Viner, Funeral Director. All work and business stopped throughout the district for the duration of the funeral out of respect.

A Waxed Paper Negative photograph of Allington Castle by Lady Caroline Neville. One a series of Kentish Architectural studies exhibited at the London Royal Photographic Society 1855-1858.

RALPH PELHAM NEVILL (1832-1914) High Sheriff of Kent (married Louisa Maclean (1833-1919) and had seven children. They lived in Lantern (Malling) House until 1873. Ralph was

a keen, able sportsman, huntsman, dog and cattle breeder. For eight years he commanded a troop in the West Kent Yeomanry. The family gave the small Green, on which stands the Town Sign and the statue "Hope", to the Parish.

PERCY LLEWELYN NEVILL enlarged the Lantern estate by buying property in Town Hill c.1900.
During World War 1 the house was used as a Voluntary Aid Detachment Hospital and the estate was eventually divided and partly built on. Malling House (Lantern House) is an ancient and commanding site. A 1986 survey showed it incorporated an early timber framed building with a gable end to the road with 17th, 18th and 19th century additions. In the 18th century it was a mansion owned by the Burt family. Mrs Burt wrote to Trollop's, the wallpaper company in London, for advice on wallpaper. Valentine Phillips owned it before Earl Abergavenny but there are gaps in the record.

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SILAS NORTON (1791 – c1860)

Silas Norton and his business partner Thomas Selby were solicitors and both from ancient Kentish families. Selby was part of a very ancient Kentish family of worldwide influence who had owned property in West Malling since at least the 15th century. The Bodleian Library holds documents relating to him. Norton was born and died in West Malling. He held his law licence almost until his death at the age of 90. He married Sarah Ann Bookham and they had six children. Cricket had been played in West Malling since at least 1705. Norton and Selby linked with William George 2nd Lord Harris (1782-1845) (see below) and formed Town Malling Cricket Club.

From a woodcut 1891

The "New Ground" (or St Georges Field) was established, and the first match played in 1827. The well-known cricketer Fuller Pilch was retained on a salary of £100 per year. His duties included being Landlord of the Cricketer's Arms in Ryarsh Lane and cutting the grass! First Class cricket was first played in 1836 and attracted a "gate" of 8,000. The Lords Harris have since been enormously influential in the development of cricket in England and India.

Long thought to be the inspiration and setting for Charles Dickens's famous "Muggleton" match in the *Pickwick Papers* (1836-1837), Charles Dicken's son wrote "Muggleton is perhaps only a fancy sketch of a small country town but if anywhere Town Malling sat for it being a great place for cricket in Mr Pickwick's time." Another woodcut of West Malling High Street was included in the edition of *Pickwick Papers* which celebrated the Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

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2ND BARON HARRIS – Co-founder of West Malling Cricket Club

The first Baron (Lord) Harris bought Belmont Faversham in 1801 with his reward for winning the Battle of Seringapatam India. His son the 2nd Lord Harris (1782-1845) at the age of 16

distinguished himself by his bravery in this battle. William George Harris (2nd Lord) travelled around the world from the Cape of Good Hope to China and India. He returned to Europe fighting at Strahlsmundand and Golinde with distinction. He fought with Wellington in Flanders. In 1815 He commanded the Black Watch at Waterloo showing considerable bravery and was shot through the shoulder. He stepped into a breach saying “Well Lads if you won’t I must”. He was presented with a ceremonial sword by his comrades for his conduct in the battle. Twice shipwrecked, he saved three men from drowning by diving and rescuing them. Major General 1821, Lieutenant General 1837, he became Colonel of the Blackwatch - his old regiment.

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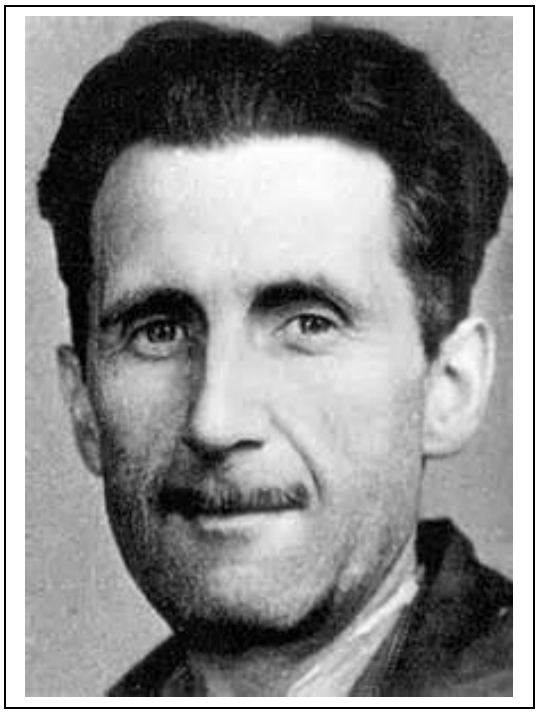

GEORGE ORWELL was the pen name used by **Eric Arthur Blair**. He was born 25th June 1903 in Motihari in British India. His ancestral home there has been declared a National Monument. When he was one, his mother sent him to England with his older sister. They settled first at Henley on Thames. He was an English essayist, journalist, critic and novelist. Famous novels include 1984 and Animal Farm. Acclaimed non-fiction works include *Road to Wigan Pier* and *Homage to Catalonia* characterised by well researched social realism. His work concerning totalitarianism created words and phrases such as Big Brother, Thought Crime, Cold War, Thought Police and Room 101 - which have become part of our language. Eric Arthur Blair stayed at West Malling Spike (workhouse) in 1931 and describes the characters and places with blunt realism. In the *Hop Picking Diaries* he describes trying to obtain work at Kronk's Farm (Cronk's Farm, Newbarns, West Malling) and working at Blest's Farm (Best's Farm). He travelled by train with other pickers. The realism of these experiences is reflected in his novel *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and used extensively in his novel The Clergyman's Daughter (1935). West Accrington Station referred to in The *Clergyman's Daughter* is thought to be West Malling. He died 21st January 1950 in London. *The Times* considered him second on a list of the 50 greatest British authors since 1945.

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WILLIAM PERFECT was probably born in Bicester in 1737. His father became vicar of East Malling in 1742. From 1756 the family was resident in West Malling High Street. William married three times and fathered ten children.

In November 1749 William Perfect became apprenticed to William Everred, a surgeon in London. He also studied under Colin McKenzie who was a strong advocate against the practice of wearing swords and cloaks at births! By 1757 he was practising in West Malling referring to himself as Surgeon, Apothecary and Man-Midwife. His studies and subsequent books show he was at the forefront of the new medical interest in Mid-Wifery.
Perfect was also a noteworthy poet of the period. His poetry was first published in *Martin's Magazine* 1755.

In 1765 Perfect became a Freemason despite the French Revolution creating public suspicion of the organisation. By Royal Patent of the Prince of Wales he was appointed in 1795 as Provincial Grand Master of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Kent.

His second child, Sarah, went on to marry Sylvester Harding, a well-known miniaturist painter at the time whose work is still famous today, and London's National Portrait Gallery once staged a retrospective exhibition of his work.

William Perfect died in 1809 was buried in the tomb he constructed in East Malling Churchyard. His triple oak and lead coffin was brought at midnight from West Malling by torchlight in a cortege drawn by black horses.

Medical
Perfect wrote articles on autopsies such as the examination of the body of a woman who died after eating a large quantity of cucumbers! His first medical book *Methods of Cure in Some Particular Cases of Insanity* was published 1778 and *Cases in Mid-Wifery*, two volumes, 1781 and 1783. These books are of great interest to social historians as they show the social care systems in place and details of local conditions in 18th century West Malling.

He wrote against the practice of flinging corpses of hanged men into a common pit and tried to relieve the conditions for prisoners.
Inoculation against Smallpox was introduced into England in 1721 with great suspicion. In 1761 Perfect was advertising inoculation and with Dr Porter inoculated much of Kent, and orchestrated inoculation over a large part of England. He inoculated thousands from his home.
By 1770 he was well known for his advanced care of the mentally ill, and in 1774 was licensed to care for up to ten patients in his own home with his family of ten children. He wrote on humane care systems. Later he bought two other High Street houses.
In 1783 he became an MD, then a member of The London Medical Society in 1795 with a consultancy in the Strand. With his son he was probably a founder of The Benevolent Society for The Relief of Widows and Orphans of Medical Men in Kent.

Literary
Perfect's poetry was first published in *Martin's Magazine* 1755. He wrote political articles such as his support of William Pitt's plea for mercy for Admiral Byng, and contributed to publications including *The Westminster Journal, Gentleman's Magazine, Mechell's Chronicle* and *Shrubs of Parnasses* to which Samuel Johnson and Garrick were subscribers. In 1757 he began the first of nine folio books. His sharp and witty descriptions of West Malling people, the contents of his friends shop, the Bear Pub (now The Farmhouse), and long poem about life and the seasons in West Malling open a unique "time window", as does his book *Bavin of Bays*.

Although never a wealthy man, William Perfect was friends with many of the aristocratic families of Kent and also Francis Honeywood the "restorer" of Malling Abbey. He acted in plays at the Assembly Rooms and played cricket.

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FULLER PILCH was born in Horningtoft, Norfolk on 17 March 1803. He had two elder brothers who were professional cricketers. He started his own cricketing career at Lords in 1820 playing for Norfolk against Marylebone. By the late 1820s he had become recognised as the best batsman England had produced, and that continued until the appearance of WG Grace in the 1860s. He developed a style of playing forward to the ball to rush the bowler. This shot became known as the “Pilch Poke”, and that term is still recognised today. In 1835 he transferred to the Town Malling team on a salary of £100 a year, and took over the Cricketers’ Inn which had a cricket field attached (Kent’s county ground at the time). The Cricketers’ Inn later became a private house and is recorded as the last building in Ryarsh Lane. In 1842 the county ground moved to Canterbury, and so did Pilch - to play for Kent’s county side, where he remained until he retired in 1855, having played for Kent through 19 seasons. He amassed a total of 10 centuries - which was quite an accomplishment when you consider how poor some of the pitches were.

There is a plaque at the Old Cricket Ground, which is now accessed from Norman Road, which gives a brief history of cricket in West Malling and Pilch's starring role in it. Pilch never married, and died on 1st May 1870 of dropsy, aged 67. He is buried in St Gregory’s Church in Canterbury, where there is a large monument to him.

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THOMAS SELBY was born in November 1791 in Gillingham, Kent. At the time of writing, we know little about his early life and any additional information would be gladly welcomed. What is known, however, follows.

His parents were Thomas and Mary Selby who were living in the Bishop's Palace, Otford around the time of his birth. In 1817 he married Louisa Cline at Hythe, but sadly she died in 1831 and in the same year he married Marie de Loecker (a Belgian) in Lambeth. Basic information on Thomas Selby can be found here, although the mention of a third wife is believed to be incorrect.

In 1828 he went into partnership with his younger brother George, who was a solicitor practising in London, and his cousin Silas Norton joined as well. (There is a separate plaque in West Malling to Silas Norton.) Thomas continued to practise in West Malling, but in the 1850s the practice ran into financial difficulties. What actually went wrong is very complex, but it seems that he and his brother had accumulated enormous debts, amounting to over £20M in 2021's value. The partnership dissolved in 1844 and all three went bankrupt. Thomas Selby and Silas Norton applied for discharge certificates in November 1855, and George Selby followed soon after in December of the same year. Perhaps Thomas was already thinking of retiring, but in the middle of 1855, he sold off his considerable assets (probably including Abingdon House) and a little later moved to France. His wife Marie died in Boulogne-sur-Mer in 1858, and Thomas died there in 1874 leaving less than £200 to his son Thomas.

The story of the bankruptcies is a very complex one and they were no doubt very notable and scandalous events of the time. There is more information with links to external documents below.

In 1827, while he was living in West Malling, he and two others, Silas Norton and Lord Harris, founded the West Malling, then Town Malling, cricket ground (see the blue plaque for Norton, link above). In 1835 Selby enticed Fuller Pilch to move to Kent (see the blue plaque for Pilch), and in 1836 Selby inaugurated a new Kent County Cricket Club

with the West Malling ground as its headquarters, and he became the team selector for matches.

Thomas Selby was also a cricketer himself, and played on the Kent cricket team from 1839 to 1841. In this period West Malling was the centre of Kent cricket. Here Kent played the Town Malling Club itself as well as sides from Sussex, Nottinghamshire and England. Crowds of over 6,000 spectators would gather for these matches, in an outer circle surrounding only about half the current ground, in the pavilion corner. The circle would contain carriages of the nobility and gentry, hop wagons covered with awnings made of hop cloths, marquees and booths. Order was kept by the cracking whip of a "ringmaster". The mower was a scythe, and players changed in hop oast houses.

Thomas Selby was part of a very ancient Kentish family of worldwide influence, and it is thought that he was part of the family that owned Ightham Mote. The Bodleian Library holds documents relating to the Selby family including 24 catalogued documents dating from 1450 concerning property in West Malling, still with their original seals.

Selby – bankruptcy information

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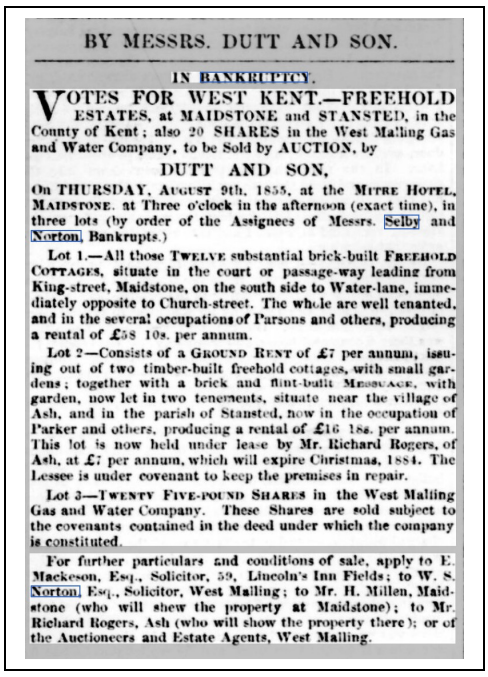
The Selby name

It is very likely that Thomas Selby (and George) were linked to the Selbys of Ightham who owned Ightham Mote for a long time – but the link has not yet been established. Information on Thomas Selby and his immediate family can be found here. The early part of the family tree of the Selbys of Ightham can be found here.

Another tantalising Selby has also emerged. Dorothy Selby (1572-1641) married William Selby III, and she was a daughter of Charles Bonham *of West Malling*. The marriage was brokered by Walsingham, the Tudor spymaster. There is a bust of her in Ightham church which is said to have been carved by the Master Mason to the Crown, Edward Marshall, and as she was childless, several children feature on the memorial. Her claim to fame is that it is said that she exposed The Gunpowder Plot. Her love of needlework was her downfall, as she pricked her finger and died of blood poisoning.



BY MESSRS. DUTT AND SON.

IN BANKRUPTCY.

VOTES FOR WEST KENT.—FREEHOLD ESTATES, at MAIDSTONE and STANSTED, in the County of Kent; also 20 SHARES in the West Malling Gas and Water Company, to be Sold by AUCTION, by

DUTT AND SON,

On THURSDAY, AUGUST 9th, 1855, at the MITRE HOTEL, MAIDSTONE, at Three o'clock in the afternoon (exact time), in three lots (by order of the Assignees of Messrs. Selby and Norton, Bankrupts.)

Lot 1.—All those TWELVE substantial brick-built FREEHOLD COTTAGES, situate in the court or passage-way leading from King-street, Maidstone, on the south side to Water-lane, immediately opposite to Church-street. The whole are well tenanted, and in the several occupations of Parsons and others, producing a rental of £58 10s. per annum.

Lot 2.—Consists of a GROUND RENT of £7 per annum, issuing out of two timber-built freehold cottages, with small gardens; together with a brick and flint-built MESSUAGE, with garden, now let in two tenements, situate near the village of Ash, and in the parish of Stansted, now in the occupation of Parker and others, producing a rental of £16 18s. per annum. This lot is now held under lease by Mr. Richard Rogers, of Ash, at £7 per annum, which will expire Christmas, 1884. The Lessee is under covenant to keep the premises in repair.

Lot 3.—TWENTY FIVE-POUND SHARES in the West Malling Gas and Water Company. These Shares are sold subject to the covenants contained in the deed under which the company is constituted.

For further particulars and conditions of sale, apply to E. Mackeson, Esq., Solicitor, 59, Lincoln's Inn Fields; to W. S. Norton, Esq., Solicitor, West Malling; to Mr. H. Millen, Maidstone (who will shew the property at Maidstone); to Mr. Richard Rogers, Ash (who will show the property there); or of the Auctioneers and Estate Agents, West Malling.

The bankruptcies

Thomas Selby, Silas Norton and George Selby dissolved their partnership on 25 March 1844. This

was almost certainly caused by the enormous debts they had accumulated, and they all became bankrupt. They applied for their certificates (of discharge) late in 1855, George on his own account as he worked out of London, and Thomas and Silas jointly. The court hearings were reported in detail in the *Maidstone Advertiser and Kentish Advertiser*, Thomas and Silas on 6 November 1855 and George on 11 December 1855. The reports can be found in the British Newspaper Archive, but readers will need to set up an account.

In the judgement on Thomas and Silas given on 23 November, the judge allowed Silas his certificate (although with a one year suspension), but denied any certificate for Thomas. He was judged to have committed fraud and a breach of trust in dealings with George and a Mr Hodges, George's business partner in a manufacturing venture. Thomas had a deficit of funds of over £34,000. This was after he had sold his private property. He went to appeal, but lost that as well. The appeal court judges said Thomas's conduct was "*a breach of every duty which he owed as a solicitor to his client, and amounted to a malversation of the most serious character*."

George was not so harshly punished as his brother. He was judged to have been an accessory after Thomas's fraud, and was granted his certificate, but suspended for two years. In giving his judgement, Commissioner Evans said this was the "*case of a man who had once filled a most respectable position, and had carried on business in London as a solicitor. Like many others, he was not satisfied to let well alone, but had resorted to a variety of speculations, had entered into various partnerships, and had carried on several schemes until he had left himself in the court in the melancholy position of owing debts and liabilities to the amount of nearly £200,000, and had not sufficient to pay his creditors a farthing in the pound.*"

As well as being a solicitor, one of George's "speculations" was in the manufacture of iron and brass tubes, with his client and partner Mr Hodges. There is a lot of information on them here, but refer to pages 65, 74, 76-80, 92, 93, 129-133. The author describes George as "*a very clever but dishonest solicitor: a fraudster and an archetypal Dickensian villain. Hodges, his client since at least 1828, was possibly just one of many that [George] Selby had defrauded during his, seemingly, successful career as a lawyer and businessman*."

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Admiral CHARLES STEWART bought Malling Place in 1718 and installed in it a captured Spanish ship's mast and leather covered doors.

The son of a Viscount, he saw service in the Nine Years War, wars of the Spanish Succession, Quadruple Alliance, Austrian Succession and other campaigns. Early in his career he lost a hand. In 1720 he commanded a squadron against the Sale Rovers and Mediterranean Pirates. He negotiated a treaty with Morocco and obtained the release of 296 British prisoners. He served as Commander in Chief in the West Indies becoming a Member of Parliament for Malmesbury 1723-1727 and Portsmouth 1737 until his death. A mahogany Spanish ship's mast in the staircase and leather covered doors in Malling Place come from his active service.

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PETER WOOLRIDGE TOWNSEND

joined the Royal Air Force in 1933. He was one of three pilots that shot down the first enemy aircraft over England at the start of World War 2, which led to him being awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC). In 1940 he was a notable pilot in the Battle of Britain, acting throughout the action as squadron Leader of 85 Squadron in Hurricanes. In August 1940 he was shot down and wounded over Tonbridge. He was awarded a Distinguished Service Order (DSO) in 1941. He went on to fly Spitfires and led a night flying squadron. In 1943 he became commanding officer of RAF West Malling, and was promoted to Group Captain in 1948. Douce's Manor was used as accommodation, and also served as the headquarters for RAF West Malling and the officers' mess. Townsend was credited with a total of eleven kills.

He is also known for his romance with Princess Margaret, whom he met when, after the war, he became equerry to King George VI. Unfortunately Townsend was divorced, and in the social environment at the time a marriage would have been met with severe disapproval, so the Princess broke up the relationship. He spent most of his later life as a writer.

Also stationed at RAF West Malling between April and December 1941 was Guy Gibson, then acting Squadron Leader of 29 squadron of Bristol Beaufighters. Later Wing Commander Gibson went on to lead the famous Dam Busters raid in 1943 for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest military award for bravery.

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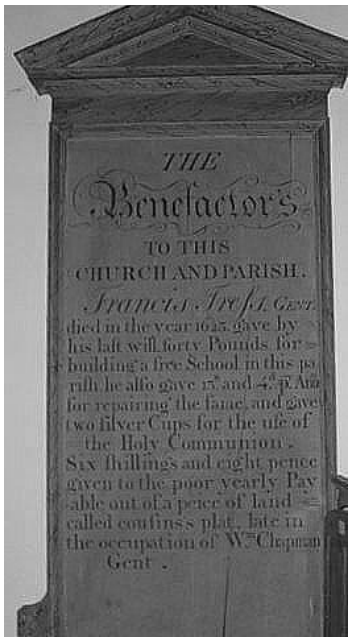
FRANCIS TRESS



Children of West Malling have been educated on this site for over three hundred years. The plaque in this photograph is in St Mary's Church. It states in 1623 Francis Tress, gentleman, gave £40 for building a Free School, 15 shillings and 4 pence for repairing it, two silver cups and 6 shillings and 8 pence yearly to the poor to be paid out of a piece of land called Coussin's Plat (sic) occupied by William Chapman a gentleman. Little is known about Tress. His name could be a corruption of Tracey. There are ancient tombs attributed to the Tress family in Offham Churchyard. It is not known where Tress lived in West Malling. The house may stand today.

The Historian Edward Hasted in 1798 recorded that Tress also gave the land for the school and charged one of his houses here 13 shillings and 8 pence per annum for repairs. Four principal freeholders were appointed to administer the charity for ever which is vested in the Ministry. In 1798 it was being paid out of Robert Sutton's estate. The schoolhouse was occupied at 2 guineas per annum by the Master's widow. The Ordnance Survey Map of 1800 shows the building. The 1865 map notes it as a school for endowed boys. The school continued, and there are still residents living who attended as pupils.

In the mid twentieth century the school became private houses. The forty ton stone inglenook fireplace was removed from the Master's house (no. 3) but the house still retains elements of Tress's original school. The school is an important part of local social history. Anyone who has information should contact West Malling Parish Council.

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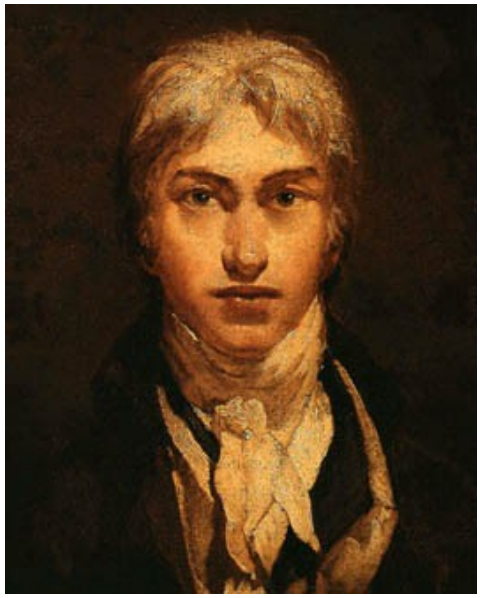

JOSEPH WILLIAM MALLORD TURNER was described by the leading nineteenth-century art critic John Ruskin as the artist who could “most stirringly and truthfully measure the moods of nature”. Turner's youthful genius as a landscape artist is captured in three surviving watercolour sketches of West Malling dated by art historian Andrew Wilton to 1791-2, when the artist was aged 15 or 16. These depict the cascade in Swan Street, Malling Abbey from the north-west, and St Leonard's Tower under a stormy sky (unfinished, but a foretaste of his dramatic landscapes of later years). Two further pencil sketches of Malling Abbey survive dated 1798.

Turner's West Malling sketches have also proved invaluable as historical documents, not least in showing that the cascade was in existence well before 1810 (the date inscribed above the arch) and in recording the condition of St Leonard's Tower in the late eighteenth century.

The circumstances of Turner's visits to West Malling are unrecorded, but he exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy from 1790 onwards and may well have been introduced to the picturesque 'antiquities' of West Malling by John Downman ARA, then a seasoned Royal Academy exhibitor who inherited Went House (opposite the cascade) following the death of his uncle in 1783.

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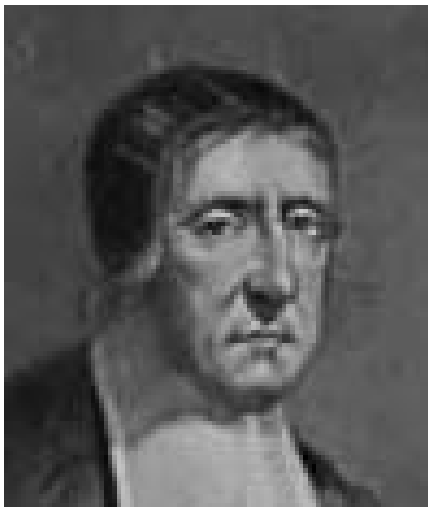

Sir THOMAS TWISDEN presided at the trials of the executioners of Charles I in 1660.

Born 1602 at Roydon, East Peckham he attended Emmanuel College Cambridge in 1614. He was admitted to the Inner Temple 1617, called to the Bar in 1626 and married Jane Thomlinson in 1639. Jane Thomlinson was the sister of the man who escorted Charles I to his execution. Twisden bought Malling Place in 1642. He became a Bencher in 1646 and changed the spelling of his name from Twysden to Twisden. At this time he became Member of Parliament for Maidstone but was excluded in 1648. He became Sergeant at Law in 1654 and bought The Manor of Bradbourne House, East Malling, Kent in 1656. After the Coronation of Charles II, he became MP for Maidstone again in 1660 and was knighted. After the trials of the Regicides he was made a baronet in 1666. He died in 1683.

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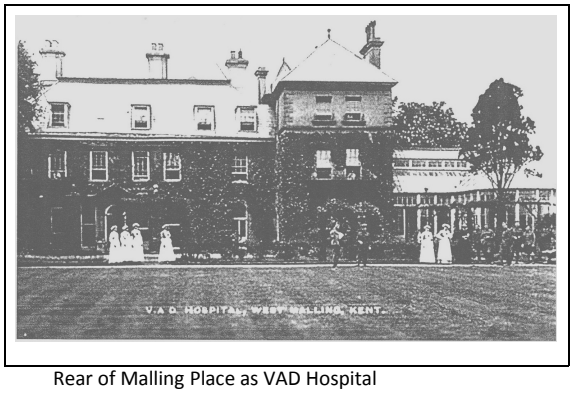
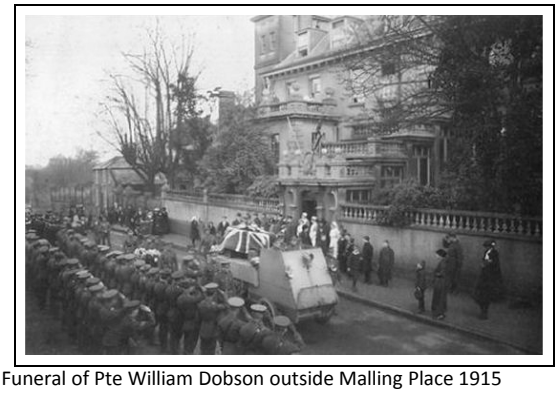
Mrs ROSALIND ISABEL WINGFIELD-STRATFORD, MBE was born in 1858, the daughter of Hon Rev Edward Vesey Bligh JP and Lady Isabel. See footnote. She married Cecil Vernon Wingfield-Stratford in 1881. He was a lieutenant with the Royal Engineers. Being in the army meant that the couple lived in many places throughout their married life, but when Cecil retired in 1910 they settled into Fartherwell Hall (pictured above), which was part of a large estate just outside West Malling, and owned at the time by Rosalind's parents. Her father died in 1908, and when her mother died in 1915, the estate was left to Cecil and Rosalind. Given the size of Fartherwell Hall (it had 14 servants) and the mother being on her own, it is likely that Cecil and Rosalind had moved in when he retired. Fartherwell Hall was demolished after WW2. It was just off Fartherwell Road, roughly where Fartherwell House now is.



Rear of Malling Place as VAD Hospital


Funeral of Pte William Dobson outside Malling Place 1915

When the First World War broke out in 1914, Cecil was recalled to the army. At the time, Malling Place was owned by Percy Nevill, related to Rosalind through her mother. He offered it for use as a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) Hospital. The VAD was founded in 1909 mostly by the British Red Cross, to receive and treat wounded men returning from the front. By 1914 there were over 3,000 VAD Hospitals in the UK. Rosalind volunteered her services and was appointed Commandant here at what was known as "Kent 150". She was awarded the MBE in 1920 for "services in connection with war refugees". Sadly, given her important role with the VAD, we have been unable so far to find a photograph of Rosalind or her husband. Any further information or images would be welcome.

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Cecil Vernon Wingfield-Stratford was born in 1853 at Addington Place, Addington. He was educated at the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich and joined the Royal Engineers as a lieutenant in 1873. From 1907 to 1910 he was Chief Engineer, Irish Command. He retired in 1910 but was recalled in 1914 to serve in WW1. He held a command on the western front as a Brigadier-General, participating in the battle of Loos in 1915, and the Somme in 1916. He was mentioned in dispatches four times, and was awarded the CBE in 1916 and the CB in 1918.

During his earlier life he played football (outside-left) for the Royal Engineers and earned one cap for England against Scotland in 1877. He played in the 1875 FA Cup final at Kennington Oval for the Royal Engineers against the Old Etonians. He died at Fartherwell Hall in 1939.

More information

Footnote

Hon Rev Edward Vesey Bligh JP was the son of Edward Bligh, 5th Earl of Darnley and his wife, Lady Isabel, was the daughter of William Nevill, 4th Earl of Abergavenney. They lived in Fartherwell Hall just outside West Malling. The son joined the British Diplomatic Service, and then he met his future wife. William Nevill insisted that his daughter married a clergyman (he was a clergyman himself), so Edward Bligh left the Diplomatic Service and joined the church, married as a curate and later he was the Vicar at Birling. Bligh was also a cricketer of some note: he played for Kent, Middlesex and England.

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GLADYS FRANCES MIRIAM WRIGHT,
Pioneer of Physical Education, founder of English Gymnastic Society, life-saving hero, competitive and long distance open water swimmer - went from grocer's assistant to founding her own college of physical education. Leaving school with no qualifications she travelled to study at colleges and universities in Denmark, Sweden and Finland. She was a pioneer, determined to introduce new ideas in teaching in the UK. Gladys attracted loyalty and respect in friends and acquaintances, as well as many influential people who took up her cause.

Early Life

Gladys was born on 8 July 1891 in West Malling Kent. Her parents Clara Wright (nee Hunter) from Australia, and Edward Henry Wright, ran the family's grocery and wine merchant's shop on the High Street. By 1901 the family had moved to Gravesend and then to Chatham by 1911. In Chatham Gladys was employed as a cashier in a grocery and provisions shop, however she was clearly a proficient swimmer and was employed part-time to teach girls to swim by the City of Rochester Education Committee.

World War One

During WWI Gladys organized swimming galas to entertain and raise money for wounded soldiers, and she also worked for the Red Cross Strood Voluntary Aid Detachment. By then Gladys was attracting media attention for her long-distance swimming. In a 9-mile race along the River Medway, Gladys was pitted against a field of male non-commissioned officers, not only did she win, but the next competitor finished 35 minutes behind her! In 1919 the organisers of a 5-mile race along the Thames invited Gladys to take part, but when it emerged that she had been paid as a swimming coach she was classed as being a "professional" and her entry was cancelled.

A love for teaching

Autumn 1919 Gladys was taken on to coach children at the Chatham Junior Commercial School in swimming and other forms of physical exercise. Teaching attracted Gladys, but she didn't have any qualifications, so during the Commercial School's summer holiday in July 1920 she travelled to London to obtain a passport, then took a ferry to Denmark where she attended a one-month training course at the Junker Institute in Silkeborg, Denmark. The Institute taught Ling's system of Swedish gymnastics in courses aimed at teachers. For the next ten years Gladys divided her time between teaching and studying. Teaching at the Tiffin Girls' School, Kingston-upon-Thames, Chelsea Polytechnic, Bergman Österberg Physical Training College at Dartford, and Richmond County School for Girls. Whilst also studying the Scandinavian systems of exercise in Denmark, Sweden and Finland. In 1923 Gladys used her newly acquired knowledge to set up her own annual Scandinavian gymnastics summer schools at Herne Bay College, before they moved to Milner Court, Sturry (now part of Junior King's School), in the 1930s. The courses were aimed at teachers and featured gymnastics, swimming, diving and dance. News reels from the time show Gladys conducting a **large gymnastics display**, and students taking part in a fancy-dress gala. During her travels Gladys had met Stina Kreuger from Sweden, a lecturer of physical education, the two would remain close friends and business partners for the rest of their lives.

Lifesaving

Gladys made the headlines of the national newspapers when, in June 1920, she plunged into the river fully clothed, to rescue Alfred Gilbert, a five-year-old, who had fallen off Rochester pier into the Medway. There followed a second rescue in August 1920 when Gladys and some friends were sailing on the Medway. A Mr A Burgess fell overboard from his motorboat, and again Gladys jumped in fully dressed and supported him until a rope could be thrown from the boat.

Development of new ideas

By the mid-1930s Gladys and Stina were busy organizing the summer schools, putting on large displays of Scandinavian gymnastics around the UK, and organizing study trips to Denmark. They also had the time to found the English Gymnastics Society. Gladys came to realise that a permanent base for promoting physical exercise was needed. In July

1938 Gladys and Stina were running the annual summer school at Sturry when St Albans Court at Nonington, came on the market. St Albans Court had everything they needed, accommodation and lots of land, but the asking price was high. Gladys set up a company that issued shares, secured loans and attracted donations, and through this was able to scrape together enough money to secure St Albans Court. By July 1938 St Albans Court was ready to be opened as Nonington College of Physical Education. The original aim was to recruit 30 female students per year to study a three-year diploma course, a target it quickly met. The War saw the College evacuate first to Avoncroft College and then to Grafton Manor Hotel, both in the Bromsgrove area. Meanwhile St Albans Court was rented out to Eastry and District Rural District Council for the duration of WWII.

The college at Nonington

The College returned to Nonington in the summer of 1945. From 1945 to 1951 the College received good reports from official inspectors, and its students excelled in local and national sporting events. In 1949 Gladys led three teams of Nonington students to the Lingiad in Sweden, a major event featuring 15,000 gymnasts from 60 countries. She had come full circle, from being a student of physical exercise in Sweden, to leading her own students in the event. However, the late 1940s saw changes to funding of education meaning running a private college was no longer viable, Gladys was approaching 60 and must have seen that it was time to retire. Gladys started negotiations with Kent Council culminating in 1951 with the sale of her beloved College to the Council.

Life after the college

To begin with Gladys and Stina stayed in Nonington, they simply moved to a house close by with views of their college. There followed a move to Old Dover Road, Canterbury, Gladys was actively involved with the Friends of Canterbury Cathedral and the new house must have been more

convenient. Gladys was also a proud member of the Association of Men of Kent and Kentish Men, and she kept up with her many friends from the field of physical education. When Stina died on 7 July 1977 Gladys moved into a flat in the precincts of Canterbury Cathedral. Gladys died on 19 June 1980.

Gladys's legacy, a flourishing college 1951 to1986

As new initiatives were introduced by the government, the college changed. Male students were welcomed, the number of students quadrupled, degrees in Movement Studies and then later Performing Arts were introduced but by 1986 small specialist colleges were phased out and the college had to close.

Decoration for Gladys.

In 1934 Gladys was awarded the Medal, First Class with golden cross, of the Order of the White Rose of Finland in recognition of public service to the cause of gymnastics and Anglo-Finnish relations.

A tribute from a Nonington student of Gladys.

From Doreen Webster née Wilkinson, Nonington College 1946-49.
"There's nothing as satisfying as paying tribute to those who left a mark on us. Your indelible mark remains with me. You taught me well. Thank you for your dedication, your efforts, patience and wisdom. "

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Gladys Frances Miriam Wright - extra Information

Source documents, web pages and extra reading for Gladys Frances Miriam Wright.

Census returns,1891, 1901, 1921, 1939 pre WWII register, Gladys Wright birth, baptism, death records, family trees www.ancestry.co.uk

English Gymnastic Society brochure, 1938 National Archives. Kew. www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Gladys Wright - Wikipedia

Geoff Ettridge's blogpost on Medway's Lady Swimmers:
https://geofframbler.blog/2020/05/07/medways-19th-century-lady-swimmers/
Gill Clarke and Ida M. Webb. Gladys Frances Miriam Wright. (Oxford, 2007) available here by subscription https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/93577

Webb, Ida M. (1999). The Challenge of Change in Physical Education: Chelsea College of Physical Education – Chelsea School, University of Brighton 1898–1998. Routledge. ISBN 0-7507-0976-6.

J. A. Chapman and J. M. Whittles, Nonington College, 1938–1986: a short history in photographs. Commemoration booklet 1986 (limited print run - still some available)

Kent Archives and Local History: https://www.kentarchives.org.uk/
Kent Archives, Maidstone. CKS, Nonington archive papers

Kent Archives, Maidstone W. Betts, portrait, 1951, CKS, Nonington archive

Medway Archives: https://cityark.medway.gov.uk/

Red Cross Society Archives: https://vad.redcross.org.uk/en Women's Voluntary Service
The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: https://www.oxforddnb.com/ Gladys Wright
Tiffin Girls' School https://www.tiffingirls.org/about-us/school-history/

www.findmypast.co.uk newspapers articles on Gladys Wright and Stina Krueger.

https://nonington.org.uk/eswalt-later-st-albans-court-nonington/a-brief-history-of-nonington-college-of-physical-education/ Nonington college history written by Stephen Burke

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Afterword

The West Malling Blue Plaques Project started in early 2015 and was the brainchild of Peter Cosier. He already had a lot of the research done. Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council (TMBC) was very supportive of the idea. They said they would pay for the plaques and arrange for a website to be hosted. It was Peter Cosier's idea to incorporate a QR code on the plaques to give access to a website where we could place detail and background information. I entered the scene soon after it started to add substance to these fine intentions. I designed and specified the plaques so they were durable and cheap to replace if needed. (Though to date not one has been vandalised or damaged, and they look as fresh as the day they were put up.)

Trudy Dean (TMBC) led the project in the early days and was supportive as it progressed, and Peter Cosier and I effectively took over the day-to-day running. Trudy also arranged for project to have space on the website of Visit Kent and set that arm of the project in motion.

The agreement of all those involved in the Project was that we did not want it encumbered by any copyright issues. The data was for educational use – it could be copied and used freely. The website was clean and uncluttered

I also put the website content into a suitable form from various texts and pictures which I was given, liaised with Visit Kent and ensured it all went on the site properly. Peter Cosier did much of the research and others were brought in as well.

There then followed a very busy year culminating with an opening ceremony arranged by Trudy Dean of Phase 1 plaques on 25 November 2015. The ceremony was attended by (amongst others)

Tracy Crouch MP (then Minister for Sport and Civil Society)
Tom Tugendhat MP
William Alexander, High Sheriff of Kent
Michael Harrison, Chair of Kent County Council
Amanda Cottrell, Chair of Visit Kent
Owen Baldock, The Mayor of Tonbridge & Malling

Phase 1 comprised 17 plaques (and locations) covering 23 individuals who were mentioned on the website.

We knew there would be a Phase 2 as there were some individuals for whom we did not have enough information at the launch, and we knew others would appear as well. At the time of writing, I do not know if there will be other contenders for more blue plaques and I think Phase 2 is probably finished. In phase 2 we put up another

6 plaques. The last plaque to be put up was to Gladys Wright, and was put up by me in early 2024.

A few months ago I became aware that Visit Kent (who hosted the project web pages) was being closed down. This brought to the top something that had been troubling me for some while. It seems to me that whatever website hosts such information, it will not be “future proof” – as websites will come and websites will go. And there is a lot of original research information in the content which could be permanently lost. One can try to find somewhere with some permanence – like a library or archive site – but it is still difficult to predict if they will ever close.

So I have put this document together in pdf format to give some sort of permanence to the data. Websites come and websites go, but documents like this can go on for ever. This document contains all the original material put on to the Visit Kent site. Hopefully people will download it so there will be many copies. There is no copyright problem: it may be quoted, copied, printed without reference to me or anyone on the project.

With this document I hope to provide as well (although I don’t know how yet) all sorts of odd files containing background material which would otherwise be lost: at present the only place they reside is on my desktop.

Ray Lawrence
November 2025

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Acknowledgements

This project was conceived by Peter Cosier, who also undertook together with Ray Lawrence, the research work into the social history of the characters featured. Other local residents also helped in providing material and checking its content before publication – notably Matt Christmas who produced much of the information on Thomas Selby, Carolyn Shortland who provided just about all of the information on Gladys Wright, and Debbie Sutch who proof read all of it. Ray Lawrence also produced the plaque in its final form, incorporating a QR code. The project was coordinated by Malling Action Partnership working with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, and Visit Kent who initially agreed to host the QR code material. We are grateful to all home owners who agreed to display these plaques on their homes to ensure that the fascinating stories of West Malling people who have played an important part in our local and often national history will not be forgotten.

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